

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY  
REMARKS WHILE TOURING FORT BENNING, AS QUOTED IN THE PRESS  
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# Defense chief aims to defend South Korea

## Perry takes tour of Benning

By Clint Claybrook  
Staff Writer

As tensions mount in Korea, beefing up the counter-artillery defense of South Korea is the first priority in the region, Secretary of Defense William Perry said Monday during a low-key tour of Fort Benning.

The North Koreans have massed artillery pieces along the border within striking range of Seoul, the capital of South Korea, Perry said during a stop at Red Cloud Range. "We have already under way a program to improve our counterbattery," to protect the city. "That would be top priority in improving that further."

The second, he said, is to be able to rapidly deploy more tactical aircraft if tensions on the Korean peninsula continue to build. U.S. forces in the South are already at a higher state of readiness and if tensions continue to grow, "we will take more steps of reinforcements and some of those will be quite visible," he warned.

What he didn't say is whether there is any move under way to do that or to increase the number of U.S. troops on the peninsula while North Korean leaders continue to posture and gesture and threaten war if the United Nations tightens sanctions in a dispute over interna-

### ABOUT THE COVER

Secretary of Defense William Perry prepares to drop an 81mm mortar round "down the tube" during his visit to Fort Benning Monday. Photo by Joe Maher.

ional inspections of possible nuclear facilities in the North. He pointed out that the U.S. has already shipped additional Apache helicopters and some Patriot missiles to South Korea in recent months. He didn't say whether Fort Benning — or what type forces — might have other roles if more troops are deployed to defend the southern half of that Asian peninsula nation.

When asked about another potential hot spot, Perry said it is hoped that economic sanctions against Haiti "will be sufficient to make the military government step down. If not, we will have to face that problem." Diplomatic solutions are being sought, he said.

Perry, 66, became defense secretary in February when his predecessor, Les Aspin, quit under pressure. At Fort Benning, he visited rookie Airborne School students, talked to a high school class that was visiting on post, fired a couple of rounds from an 81mm mortar at Red Cloud Range and shared lunch with enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

Traveling with a small staff, Perry's visit was obviously low-key and that was on purpose, said Susan Wallace, a Perry spokeswoman. The entire visit was keyed toward enlisted soldiers, trying to get a feel for their quality of life and how they feel about their training, she said.

Perry will be making similar visits to Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy stations in the near future, also with an emphasis on hearing from enlisted soldiers, Wallace said. Richard Kidd, the sergeant major of the Army, picked Fort Benning for the first of those trips, Wallace said.

Except for a one-star Army general who is a military aide to the defense secretary, the higher-rank officers were conspicuously absent at Red Cloud range, where Perry talked briefly at mid-morning with the members of a mortar leaders course and fired a couple of rounds by dropping them down an already aimed 81mm mortar tube.



Secretary of Defense William Perry receives a briefing from Sgt. 1st Class Denzel Howard as he prepares to fire a mortar round at Red Cloud Range on post earlier this week.

### Photos by Joe Maher

Post Sgt. Maj. William Acebes said Perry was interested in training at Fort Benning and also in soldiers' impressions of Army life.

Perry said training to maintain a ready force is his first priority for the military, with an emphasis on leadership and signing and retaining quality recruits not far behind.

He wrapped up his visit with a closed luncheon with soldiers at a post dining hall from which Wallace said the media was barred so soldiers "might be more candid" in talking with Perry.

There may be more combat jobs opening up soon for women in the military, Perry said. But details involving new roles for female soldiers won't be worked out until he considers recommendations by Army Secretary Togo West and Gen. Gordon Sullivan, the Army chief of staff, he said.

Military Affairs Editor Ben Wright contributed to this report.



Staff Sgt. Brian Roper handles an 81mm mortar round at Red Cloud Range.



A 60mm mortar team prepares to fire a demonstration round for the defense chief.